

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HOW TO WIN  
OVER FRIENDS AND  
INFLUENCE FAMILY

# How to Eat Healthy Without Being a Buzzkill

Over the past several years I've used a handful of different tactics to deflect the worst intentions of naysayers. Here are the ones I've found work best.

## 1. Don't get defensive

The worst thing you can do when someone criticizes you for ordering a salad is to get defensive and start preaching your nutritional superiority. I've seen this done, and it doesn't end well. Whatever you do, keep an upbeat tone and maintain perspective. Not everyone understands the importance of their daily food decisions, and it's not your job to educate them.

**INSTEAD OF:** *"At least I'm not going to have diabetes by the time I'm forty!"*

**TRY:** *"Actually the salad here is tasty as hell. Have you tried it?"*

## 2. Use humor

Without getting defensive, you can still jab back a bit, so long as it is clear you're being playful and joking. If someone asks why you aren't eating from the giant tub of stale generic cookies, cracking a joke about how it isn't your vice of choice today can break the ice and get the attention off your healthy decision.

**INSTEAD OF:** *"Eeeewwww. Haven't you ever eaten a real cookie?"*

**TRY:** *"Thanks, but I'm saving my heart attack for the weekend."*

## 3. Order creatively

No one will make fun of you for making healthier decisions if they don't notice. Ordering a burger and dissecting the meat from the bun is certain to draw attention, but there are plenty of things you can order that won't cause a second glance.

**INSTEAD OF:** *"Do your meatballs have bread crumbs? Okay, I'll have the spaghetti and meatballs without the sauce and without the spa*

*ghetti, and with extra meatballs. Oh, and a side of steamed broccoli, please.”*

**TRY:** *“I’ll have the steak and spinach salad with a glass of your best California cab, please. And can I get some blue cheese with that as well?”*

#### **4. Use happy honesty**

It’s hard for people to say bad things about you if you come across as happy and at peace with your decisions, especially if it’s clear you aren’t being motivated by your ego.

**INSTEAD OF:** *“I’m choosing salad, because I’d really like to lose ten pounds this year, so I don’t end up looking like you.”*

**TRY:** *“I’m just trying to eat a little healthier these days to see how it makes me feel.”*

#### **5. Use harmless lies**

Honesty is always the best policy, except when you’re trying to get your jerk coworkers off your back so you can enjoy your lunch.

**INSTEAD OF:** *“I’m eating a smaller lunch today, so I can hit the gym later.”*

**TRY:** *“I had a really big breakfast. I’m just not that hungry.”*

#### **6. Share alike**

If you know in advance you’re going to be bringing your own food, you have the advantage of having a meal that looks, smells, and tastes much better than anything your friends will find at the corner sandwich shop. Show off your amazing new flavors by bringing enough of something delicious to share.

**INSTEAD OF:** *“Yuck, I can’t believe you’re eating that disgusting excuse for a calzone.”*

**TRY:** *“Have you tried the mandarins from the farmers market this season? They’re freaking amazing! Here, I have an extra one.”*

## 7. Accept and nibble

Friends can be very crafty and sometimes try and force you into eating unhealthy food by offering it to you point-blank. Cheap office birthday cakes are particularly offensive. Politely turning down the objectionable substance is one strategy, but it can easily backfire. Just gratefully accept the food and pretend to eat it.

**INSTEAD OF:** *“Just a small piece for me, please.”*

**TRY:** *“Mmm . . . thanks.”*

Take one bite, keep smiling, and continue the conversation while leaving the food nonchalantly on the table. When everyone else is finishing up, subtly drop it in the trash without making a fuss (trust me, nothing is going to waste). By that time, no one will care what you’re doing. If someone does say something, just blame it on how big of a piece you were served.

## 8. Don’t offer unsolicited advice

No matter how tempting it is, don’t be the reverse jerk. Only offer nutrition advice to friends if they explicitly ask you for it; otherwise keep your trap shut. The best thing you can do to help your friends is show them what good healthy food looks and tastes like by setting a good example; then let them watch for themselves as you lose weight and get in shape.

**INSTEAD OF:** *“You know, that Lean Cuisine isn’t going to help you get rid of those thunder thighs.”*

**TRY:** *“Yes, I have lost weight! Thanks for noticing! Yeah, I’ve been reading this book called Foodist. It’s great. You should check it out.”*

## 50 Mouthwatering Words to Describe Real Food

farm fresh	poached	dry-aged	slow-roasted
fall	summer	whisked	juicy
chilled	baby	rubbed	crisp
savory	imported	rich	braised
roasted	bacon-laced	seasonal	steeped
organic	grilled	tender	handmade
winter	tasty	scented	marinated
warm	heirloom	slow-cooked	spring
smoky	fresh	hand-picked	succulent
aromatic	seared	late-season	sautéed
sweet	drizzled	colorful	hand-tossed
local	tangy	tossed	crusted
toasted	young		

## Beating Beet Aversions

If my dad can learn to like beets at the age of fifty-five, anyone can. This is the recipe that convinced him (and me a year earlier) that the humble beet can be as delicious and elegant as any exotic vegetable.

This is the perfect dish for the beet skeptic and beet lover alike, and it hardly requires any cooking skills. If you are still worried you will not like the flavor of beets, look for the milder and less messy golden or pink- and white-striped cioggia beets. Whenever possible I like to use a few different colors to mix it up, but if all you have are the common red garden beets they work beautifully on their own.

To begin you must eliminate all thoughts of substituting canned beets for fresh. Fresh roasted beets have a rich, sweet, earthy flavor that is completely unlike that of the flaccid purple slivers that come in a can. You will also need fresh mint leaves. Most grocery stores carry them; ask if you can't find them. Chèvre is a soft goat cheese that a close friend of mine describes as "like cream cheese only better." A little bit goes a very long way, so I always buy the smallest amount possible (it usually costs around \$3).

Be careful not to add the cheese directly to hot beets or it will melt and form an unattractive pink slime. It still tastes good, but it's better to avoid this problem by cooling the beets beforehand. An hour in the refrigerator works well, but if you are in a hurry you can get away with ten to fifteen minutes in the freezer. This dish is very easy to scale for large batches, making it ideal for parties and potlucks.

### **Roasted Beets with Fresh Mint and Chèvre**

SERVES 2 TO 3

**1 bunch of beets (3 large), any variety**

**1 to 2 tablespoons olive oil**

**½ cup fresh mint leaves, loosely packed**

**¼ ounce chèvre**

**Sea salt or kosher salt**

Preheat the oven to 375°F. If the leaves are still on the beets, twist them off, leaving enough stem to use as a handle for peeling. (If the beet greens are still fresh and springy, I recommend cleaning them and cooking them up with some onions and garlic—sauté them like spinach. Beet greens are so full of potassium that they taste naturally salty, so be careful with your seasoning, because they are easy to oversalt.)

Peel the beets using a vegetable peeler and chop them evenly into ¾- to 1-inch cubes. Keep in mind that the larger the pieces, the longer they will take to cook. Discard stems.

Add the olive oil to the beets and toss to coat. Sprinkle the beets with salt and place in a single layer in a large Pyrex baking pan. Place the pan in the oven on the middle rack and roast until the beets are tender and have a glazed-like appearance, stirring every 8 to 10 minutes. Roasting takes approximately 35 minutes.

When the beets are finished roasting, transfer them to a large bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and place in the refrigerator. Chill for at least 30 minutes, but 45 to 60 minutes is preferable. Five minutes before the beets are done chilling, stack the mint leaves on top of each other and chiffonade them by rolling them lengthwise like a cigarette and slicing them into thin ribbons. For very large leaves I like to cut the ribbons in half once by making a single cut through the middle of the pile along the vein of the leaves. Discard the stems.

Using a fork, crumble a small amount of the chèvre into a small bowl or plate and set it aside. When the beets are ready, sprinkle the mint onto the beets and stir, reserving a few ribbons for garnish. Adjust salt to taste. Transfer the minted beets to a serving bowl and sprinkle with the chèvre and remaining mint. Serve immediately.